



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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TEST SCHEDULED THURSDAY TO POWER FACILITIES WITH ALTERNATIVE ENERGY SOURCE

Richmond, VA – On Thursday, July 10, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) will be conducting the final of a series of burn tests to operationalize the use of warm season grasses as an alternative energy source for some of its facilities. The test will be held at Piedmont Geriatric Hospital in Burkeville. Should the test and subsequent steps prove successful, the DMHMRSAS facility will be among only a handful of sites currently capable of utilizing the grass for fuel, and potentially the only facility in the world to use the grass as its sole fuel source. The test will be:

Thursday, July 10, 2008, from 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.
Piedmont Geriatric Hospital
5001 E. Patrick Henry Highway
Burkeville, VA 23922

Governor Kaine's Executive Order 48, signed in April 2007, directed Virginia executive branch agencies to reduce energy consumption and costs. Among other benefits, this alternative energy source would both reduce fuel costs and harmful emissions.

Because of its existing boilers that are capable of burning sawdust and other wood fibers, the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech approached the DMHMRSAS Piedmont Geriatric Hospital as a possible site to burn the grasses. The wood products currently burned by the boiler create enough steam to power Piedmont and the next-door Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation. Converting the boilers to enable the burning of warm season prairie grasses will allow for further future cost savings and benefits to the environment.

Warm season grasses can be used as a renewable fuel and have a negative carbon footprint – burning the grasses may help reduce existing harmful gases in the earth's atmosphere. The grasses flourish in hot, dry, and even drought conditions and require no fertilization.

There currently is not enough warm season grass being grown in Virginia to provide ample material for Thursday's test. The grass used in the test is supplied by Ohio-based FDC Enterprises which specializes in the planting of native prairie grasslands.

Media planning to attend the event should contact [Meghan McGuire](mailto:Meghan.McGuire@dmhmrsas.virginia.gov) at (804) 786-9048.

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Virginia's public mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse services system is comprised of 16 state facilities and 40 community services boards (CSBs) that serve children and adults who have or who are at risk of mental illness, serious emotional disturbance, mental retardation, or substance use disorders.